

Religion and Custom

Hong Kong's Basic Law guarantees religious freedom and many religions are practised in Hong Kong, with the followers of Buddhism and Taoism the most numerous. Traditional Chinese festivals are celebrated along with religious holidays from a variety of faiths.

Traditional Festivals

The Lunar New Year is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar. It is celebrated during the days of the first new moon of the year, an auspicious time for friends and relatives to visit each other and to exchange gifts while children and unmarried adults receive *lai see*, or 'lucky' money, in red packets. The Dragon Boat Festival is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month to honour an ancient Chinese poet, Qu Yuan, who killed himself by jumping into a river rather than compromise his honour. Dragon boat races and the eating of rice dumplings, wrapped in bamboo leaves, are the highlights of this festival. For the Mid-Autumn Festival, on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, grown-ups and children gather under the full moon with colourful lanterns and eat mooncakes, a traditional festival delicacy. The Ching Ming Festival in spring and the Chung Yeung Festival in autumn are marked by visits to ancestral graves. Many people mark Chung Yeung by climbing hills in remembrance of one family's flight up a mountain in ancient times to escape a plague.

Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the main religions practised in Hong Kong, with around one million followers and over 400 temples, some dating back more than 700 years. The Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island is famous for its giant bronze statue of a seated Tian Tan Buddha (widely known as the 'Big Buddha'). The Chi Lin Nunnery at Diamond Hill in Kowloon is another well-known site, comprising a cluster of temple structures built in the architectural style of the Tang Dynasty. Both are popular attractions for visitors.

Buddhist organisations in Hong Kong have long been involved in social welfare and education, operating nearly 100 primary and secondary schools, elderly homes and centres for children and youth. The leading organisation, and the largest, is the Hong Kong Buddhist Association, founded in 1945. Its mission is to propagate Buddhist teaching and culture and to provide

charitable services to the public, including medical and general care for the young and the elderly. The association also runs 13 secondary schools, seven primary schools and seven kindergartens.

The major Buddhist festival takes place on Buddha's birthday, on the eighth day of the fourth month in the lunar calendar, which is observed as a public holiday in Hong Kong. On that day, followers visit Buddhist temples across the city to pay homage.

Taoism

Taoism is an indigenous religion of China with a 2,000-year history. Laozi, revered as the deity Taishang Laojun by Taoists, is traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism and the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, the main early Taoist text, dated to the late 4th century BC.

There are over one million Taoist followers and more than 300 Taoist abbeys and temples in Hong Kong, according to a survey carried out by the Hong Kong Taoist Association in 2010. The Hong Kong Taoist Association, formed by representatives of major Taoist temples and Taoists in 1967, organises a wide range of religious, cultural and charitable activities to promote the Taoist belief of the unity of heaven and man and Taoist scriptures, doctrines and moral values. These activities include the annual Taoist Day held on the second Sunday of March to celebrate the birthday of Taishang Laojun, the triennial Taoist Blessing Ceremony held on the 15th day of the 10th lunar month, lectures on Taoist scriptures and philosophy, Tai Chi classes and Taoist music classes.

The Taoist community in Hong Kong provides a range of educational, social and charitable services, including running more than 40 schools and kindergartens and subsidising courses offered by universities and tertiary institutions. They also operate clinics, homes for the elderly, care and attention homes, child care centres and community service centres in Hong Kong and provide strong funding support for education, poverty alleviation and medical care on the Mainland. They also assist in the building and repair of a number of Taoist temples in the Mainland.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a religious, ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who lived in ancient China from 551 to 479 BC. His teachings are based on a moral code for human relations which emphasises the importance of tradition and rites. Confucianism has deeply influenced the academic, political, economic and social institutions of China through the ages.

Confucianism's main feast days are Confucius's birthday on the 27th day of the eighth lunar month and Mencius's birthday on the second day of the fourth lunar month. Confucian organisations in Hong Kong include the Confucian Academy, the Confucian Association and Confucius Hall. The Confucian Academy, founded in Hong Kong in 1930, promotes the inclusion of Confucian ideas in primary, secondary and university teaching. Its Confucian Tai Shing Schools incorporate the principles of Confucianism in their education and curriculum.

Christianity

The Christian community — comprising mainly Protestants and Roman Catholics — numbers about 860,000. In addition to Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Greek, Russian and Coptic Orthodox Church all have their presence in Hong Kong.

Protestant Community

The Protestant movement in Hong Kong began in 1841 and has a current registered membership of close to 500,000 followers. The Protestant community is composed of more than 70 denominations with at least 1,480 congregations. Most of the major international denominations and former mission agencies have ecclesial branches in Hong Kong, including the Adventist, Anglican, Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Evangelical Free, Holiness, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal and Salvation Army. There are also many indigenous denominations such as The Church of Christ in China (representing Presbyterian and Congregational traditions), the True Jesus Church and the Local Church (commonly known as the Little Flock) in Hong Kong. There are also many other congregations.

The Protestant community runs three post-secondary institutions: the Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University and Lingnan University. It also runs more than 630 schools (260 kindergartens, 199 primary schools and 180 secondary schools) and 127 nurseries. In addition, it operates more than 35 theological schools, 80 Christian publishing houses and 114 Christian bookstores. There are 53 media, audio-visual production and art groups, including two Christian weekly newspapers, the *Christian Times* and *Christian Weekly*, which present news and comments from a Christian perspective, Christian media agencies which broadcast Christian TV programmes regularly and four weekly Christian radio programmes on Radio Television Hong Kong.

More than 730 para-church agencies and different Christian action groups attend to the needs of the Protestant community, respond to issues that affect Hong Kong society and support emergency relief and development projects in the Mainland and other countries. There are currently more than 450 missionaries from Hong Kong serving abroad.

The Protestant community runs seven hospitals and 17 clinics. A total of 107 multi-social centres provide a wide range of services at more than 100 community (family/youth) service centres, 11 children's homes, 169 elderly services centres and nursing homes, and 59 rehabilitation centres for mentally handicapped, disabled and drug addicts. There are more than 50 hospital chaplaincies, one airport chaplaincy and three prison chaplaincies. There are also 23 campsites.

Two ecumenical bodies, the Hong Kong Christian Council and the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, help co-operation among the Protestant churches in Hong Kong. The Chinese Christian Churches Union, established in 1915, has a current membership of 358 congregations. The Hong Kong Christian Council was formed in 1954 and is a member of the World Council of Churches. Its members — major denominations, ecumenical service agencies, seminaries and the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia — are committed to building a closer relationship among all churches in Hong Kong, the Mainland and overseas. The council also encourages local Christians to play an active part in the development of Hong Kong society. It seeks to serve holistically the wider community through

its affiliated organisations such as the Hong Kong Christian Service, United Christian Medical Service, Christian Family Service Centre, and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital.

Roman Catholic Community

The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841, became a vicariate apostolic in 1874, and a diocese in 1946. There are about 368,000 Catholics in Hong Kong served by 306 priests, 75 brothers and 481 sisters. There are 51 parishes, comprising 40 churches, 31 chapels and 26 halls for religious services conducted in Cantonese; three-fifths of the parishes also provide services in English and, in some cases, Tagalog, the Filipino language.

The diocese has its own administrative structure while maintaining close links with the Pope and other Catholic communities around the world with which it shares the same creed, scripture, liturgy and organisation.

Along with its apostolic work, one of the prime concerns of the diocese is the well-being of the community as a whole. The diocese has 273 Catholic schools and kindergartens catering to about 174,000 pupils. The schools are assisted by the Catholic Education Office. Medical and social services are provided to at least six hospitals, 13 clinics, 41 social and family service centres, 25 hostels, 16 homes for the aged, 27 rehabilitation service centres and many self-help clubs and associations. Caritas-Hong Kong is the official social welfare arm of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. These services are offered to everyone, whether or not they are Catholic.

The diocese publishes two weekly newspapers: *Kung Kao Po* and the *Sunday Examiner*. The Diocesan Audio-Visual Centre also produces cultural and educational programmes for broadcast on TV and for incorporation in DVDs for distribution.

Islam

There are an estimated 300,000 Muslims in Hong Kong. They include 40,000 Chinese, 150,000 Indonesians and 30,000 Pakistanis, and there are others from India, Malaysia, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong, a charitable organisation, co-ordinates all Hong Kong's Islamic religious activities. The trustees, nominated by the Islamic Union of Hong Kong, the Pakistan Association, the Indian Muslim Association and the Anjumane Burhani Hong Kong Dawoodi Bohra Association, manage and maintain five *masajid* (mosques), two cemeteries and one kindergarten. In addition, the trustees prepare the Islamic calendar for the Muslim community and organise the celebration of Muslim festivals and other religious events. The trustees also carry out inspections and issue certificates for the supply of 'halal' food in Hong Kong and some parts of China. The Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, established in 1922 in Wan Chai, is the major organisation representing Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong. Apart from carrying out religious and charitable activities, the association manages and maintains a college, two primary schools and two kindergartens.

There are five mosques, the oldest being the Jamia Masjid in Shelley Street on Hong Kong Island, which was built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1915 to make room for 400 worshippers. The eight-storey Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Centre in Wan Chai houses a prayer hall on two floors, a community hall, a library, a medical clinic, classrooms and offices, and can accommodate up to 1,500 people.

The imposing Kowloon Masjid and Islamic Centre, with its distinctive white marble finish, is a major landmark in Tsim Sha Tsui and a focal point for the Muslim community in Hong Kong. With three prayer halls, a community hall, a medical centre and a library, the mosque can accommodate 3,500 worshippers. There are two more mosques: Stanley Mosque inside Stanley Prison and Chai Wan Mosque at Cape Collinson. There are two Muslim cemeteries, one in Happy Valley and the other at Cape Collinson.

Charitable work among the Muslim community, including providing financial aid to the needy, medical facilities and education assistance, is carried out through the Islamic Community Fund and various local Muslim organisations.

Hinduism

The religious and social activities of the 40,000-strong Hindu community are centred on the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley. The Hindu Association of Hong Kong is responsible for the upkeep of the temple, which is used for meditation, spiritual lectures, yoga classes and other community activities, as well as the observance of major Hindu festivals such as *Diwali*, *Dussehra*, *Holi*, *Ganesh Chaturthi* and *Hanuman Puja*. Engagement and marriage ceremonies (in accordance with the Marriage Ordinance) are performed in the temple according to Hindu rites. Other important services include the administration of last rites, making arrangements for cremation and related ceremonies and the maintenance of the Hindu crematorium at Cape Collinson.

Devotional music sessions and religious discourses are held every Sunday morning, followed by a free community meal, which is also served on Monday evenings.

Sikhism

The Sikhs originally came to Hong Kong from Punjab, India, as part of the British Armed Forces in the 19th century. It was the Sikh members of the British Army Regiment stationed in Hong Kong who built the first Sikh temple, Siri Guru Singh Sabha, in 1901 in Queen's Road East, Wan Chai. The building was redeveloped in 1938 and was further extended in the 1980s to meet the demands of the growing Sikh population in Hong Kong. The present Sikh Temple is classified as a Grade II Historic Building and is managed by the Khalsa Diwan, a registered charitable organisation. The temple provides a range of voluntary services for Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, including the provision of *langar* (a free meal) and short-term accommodation for overseas visitors.

There are about 10,000 Sikhs in Hong Kong. Religious services are conducted in the temple every morning and evening. Followers of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, gather in the temple in large numbers on Sundays and on the main holy days. The most important religious

dates are the birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh (the 10th Guru) and *Baisakhi* (the birthday of all Sikhs).

Judaism

The settlement of the Jewish community in Hong Kong dates from the 1840s and comprises families drawn from different parts of the world. There are three main synagogues – Ohel Leah Synagogue (Orthodox) providing daily, Sabbath and festival services, the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong (Reform) with Sabbath and festival services, both of which share the same premises in Robinson Road; and the Chabad Lubavitch which has daily services in MacDonnell Road. All fulfil an important role in the religious, cultural and social life of the Jewish people in Hong Kong.

The Ohel Leah Synagogue was built in 1901 on land given by Sir Jacob Sassoon and his family and includes a *mikvah* (ritual bath). There is also a Jewish Cemetery built in 1857 in Shan Kwong Road, Happy Valley. The site adjoining the Ohel Leah Synagogue which contains a residential complex, also houses the Jewish Community Centre, serving all three congregations. The centre offers its 400 member families supervised kosher dining and banqueting, cultural and recreational facilities, and operates a fully kosher supermarket, a wide range of activities and classes, and a specialist library covering all aspects of Judaica. The centre functions as the focal point of social and cultural life for the community. The community also operates the Carmel School and other supplementary religious educational classes. There are several charity organisations and cultural societies, including the Jewish Women's Association, the United Israel Appeal, the Israeli Chamber of Commerce and the Jewish Historical Society which all combine to create a vibrant Jewish community in Hong Kong.

Other Faiths

People are free to practise all religions in Hong Kong. Other religions that have been established in Hong Kong for many years include the Baha'i Faith and Zoroastrianism.